

CCC NEWS RELEASE

California Conservation Corps

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NEW CCC DIRECTOR MIRRORS GOVERNOR SCHWARZENEGGER'S CALL FOR "ACTION, ACTION, ACTION..."

Sacramento---Will Semmes, recently appointed the California Conservation Corps' ninth director in September has a vision: He wants to turn the CCC into the nation's most successful workforce development program and accomplish "truly significant acts of environmental conservation in the process."

"We have the talent, inside and out," said Semmes. "It's already an outstanding organization, but my vision is to get the CCC to the forefront of California's mindset. We do a lot of great things with young adults every year, but few outside the Corps take notice. I want to change that perception. Our goal must be to help the kids. Always the kids," he said.

Semmes is the youngest CCC director in the Corps' 28-year history. At 34, he is just 9 years older than some of the young people whom he leads, who range in age from 18-25. "I know and understand what's going on inside the heads of many of those 1,200 people," said Semmes. "It hasn't been all that long since I was where they are. I joined another "Corps" at about that age – the Marine Corps. The opportunity to be a member of an elite team and really make a difference helped get my head together and taught me about life. That's exactly what I want for members of the CCC. We can steer them to a better place and get them the recognition they deserve."

Semmes does indeed seem to be in the right place at the right time as head of the CCC, because he successfully combines a love for the outdoors and vigorous activity with a deeply held concern for the environment. His personal life is full of examples; he drives a car powered with bio-diesel (a vegetable oil fuel), conserves and recycles disposable materials, makes compost at his home with a worm bin and an anaerobic digester, gardens with native plants and buys organic food. He is a big advocate of compact fluorescent light bulbs, claiming to have saved his last company thousands of dollars in energy costs by installing them. Semmes is an avid kayak paddler and lives a healthy lifestyle ("I'll follow Arnold into the weight room but I can't handle the cigars," he says with a chuckle).

"I came from the world of private industry – I co-founded and sold my own business – and I learned early on that you have to take care of yourself and stay active or you won't have the stamina needed to be a successful leader. That's one reason why I think the California Conservation Corps is the ideal place for me, because I can get outside a lot as an integral part of doing my job. I honestly believe that I have the best job in state service," he said.

Semmes grew up in New Jersey, spent part of his childhood in England, and graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans with a degree in history. He then enlisted in the U.S. Marines, was commissioned an officer, and spent four years as an infantry platoon commander and forward air controller. After achieving the rank of Captain and leaving the Marines in 1996, he co-founded and ran an Internet-based health and wellness company in Philadelphia. In 2003, he sold the company and relocated to Southern California for all the usual reasons: weather, opportunity and lifestyle.

He worked on Governor Schwarzenegger's election campaign and, in early 2004, was recruited to participate in the California Performance Review. He helped manage the 275 volunteers who assembled the massive 1,200-page document that called for fundamental changes in the way California state government does business. (The document is currently under review by California citizens up and down the state, the California Legislature and the Governor. Any decisions on implementation will come in 2005.)

After CPR's report was published in early August, Semmes assumed he was done with government-related work, but was encouraged by Governor Schwarzenegger and Maria Shriver to take over the reins at CCC with a mandate to take the organization to the next level. Semmes admits he was immediately excited by the offer, and didn't think twice about taking on the challenge. "It was a perfect fit, and I am absolutely honored to be applying the Governor and the First Lady's terrific example to the CCC," he said.

"We need to ratchet things up here," he said. "Because of budget cuts we're down to skeleton staffing at the CCC, so we need to have a great sense of urgency to find innovative and alternative funding sources. The Governor said he wanted the Performance Review to blow up the boxes instead of just thinking outside of them, and that describes my mission here as well. As good as we are, we're going to have to get better, but we can't do that using old business models and failed methods.

"The state of California has a fabulous organization in the CCC, but one that needs nurturing and refocusing. I'm going to use every skill and every ounce of my experience from the military, the private-sector and CPR, and I am absolutely confident that we'll be successful. The CCC is constructive state government at its best – helping people help themselves, and doing really useful good work in the process. It's bootstrap democracy in all its glory."

The California Conservation Corps was created by Governor Jerry Brown in 1976 and signed into law as an official state department in 1983 by Governor George Deukmejian. It now employs more than 1,200 young people who perform a variety of environmentally-related and disaster relief projects. The CCC recently had crews on the scene of the massive fires in Yolo and Amador counties, and is currently working on various transportation and flood-related projects, and fisheries restoration work up and down the state. The CCC is a department under the State Resources Agency.

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EDITORS NOTE:

If you would like to schedule an interview with Director Will Semmes, please contact Steve Haskins at either (916) 341-3133 or (916) 657-6437.